

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 10, 2014

Agenda Item: Farming Lease – Seven Sisters Wildlife Management Area

Division: Fish and Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

Seven Sisters WMA was purchased by FWP to maintain a woodland/cropland complex to benefit a diversity of wildlife while maximizing hunting opportunities, primarily for white-tailed deer and pheasants. The proposal is to renew a lease agreement for three years on 323 acres of the WMA with Steve Pust. The lessee would harvest a portion of the hay/grain crop, and leave 25 percent of crops and 35 percent of irrigated hay standing for wildlife. The benefit and purpose of the lease is to provide winter habitat and forage, primarily for wintering pheasants, deer, and turkeys. Standing and harvested crops also benefit migrating waterfowl and a variety of other wildlife species.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The Environmental Assessment for the project was released on Jan. 27, with comments accepted through Feb 16. FWP received four comments representing four individuals. Three comments were in support of the lease and one comment suggested a modification to the proposed lease. FWP issued its decision notice on Feb. 26 in support of the agricultural lease, contingent on Commission approval.

Alternatives and Analysis

Under the "no action" alternative, agricultural lands would not be farmed by a lessee and FWP would need to commit resources to manage weeds on the previously cultivated 323 acres of farm fields, and wildlife would be negatively impacted by lack of wintering habitat and forage resources. Renewing the agricultural lease, however, would benefit wildlife because high-quality wintering habitat and forage would be available, therefore the lessee, FWP and sportsmen and -women would mutually benefit through the sharecrop agreement.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends that the Commission approve the farming lease on Seven Sisters WMA, which would provide necessary winter forage for wildlife and promote quality hunting opportunities for sportsmen and women.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission approve the farming lease on Seven Sisters WMA.